

**For Immediate Release:
August 10, 2009**

**Contact: Rachel Hamrick
(202) 236-1374**

**MEETING OF THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE UNITED STATES
TO REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS AT HOME AND
ABROAD**

*The Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda Urges the Administration to
Create a Better System of Accountability Around Our Domestic and International Human
Rights Obligations*

August 10, 2009 – During the month of August, the [United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) is holding their 75th annual session to discuss the status of the United States' and other countries' human rights obligations as parties to the [International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination](#) (CERD). The Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda (comprised of human and civil rights groups around the country) believes this meeting offers the Obama Administration a unique opportunity to reaffirm our country's commitment to human rights both at home and abroad, and we urge the Administration to send a delegation to the meeting to begin a dialogue about how to implement CERD within the United States.

“The CERD meeting presents an opportunity for the Obama Administration to engage in a meaningful and inclusive dialogue about how the United States can champion human rights abroad while also living up to our ideals here at home,” said Ejim Dike, Director of the Human Rights Project at the Urban Justice Center and Steering Committee Member for the Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda. “If our country is truly committed to monitoring and fulfilling both our domestic and international human rights obligations, we need to create a better system of accountability to do so.”

The Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda proposes two key steps the Administration can take to strengthen the United States' compliance with CERD and start building human rights principles into the way our government operates.

- President Obama and Congress should heed the growing chorus of calls to strengthen and transform the U.S. Civil Rights Commission into a U.S. Civil and *Human Rights* Commission, to enable the Commission to meet the domestic and global realities of the 21st Century.
- President Obama should issue an Executive Order to reconstitute the Interagency Working Group on Human Rights (IAWG) that would serve as a coordinating body among federal agencies and departments for the promotion and respect of human rights in U.S. domestic policy.

The need for a better system of accountability including the establishment of an independent national human rights institution and the creation of appropriate mechanisms to ensure a coordinated approach to implementation of CERD at the federal, state and local levels was recommended by the CERD Committee in the [concluding observations](#) of its 2008 meeting.

“Expanding the mandate of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and creating an Interagency Working Group would strengthen our country’s ability to address the human rights implications of major disasters such as Hurricane Katrina as well as pressing issues Americans are facing today such as inequalities in access to housing, education jobs and health care,” said Ajamu Baraka, Executive Director of the US Human Rights Network and Steering Committee Member for the Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda.

The US Human Rights Network is sending representatives from civil society to attend the CERD Committee meeting. Their visit follows the submission of reports by civil society pointing out clear gaps in the United States government’s obligations on CERD including an evaluation of the current situation in the Gulf Coast.

“Our right to return to our homes and rebuild our lives and communities with dignity continues to be systematically denied nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina”, says Sharon Hanshaw of Coastal Women for Change based in Gulf Port, Mississippi. “As we speak, working class Black, Latino, Asian, and White communities throughout the Gulf are fighting to stay in formaldehyde-infested trailers to avoid being homeless because the government refuses to provide adequate housing options and resources. It is time the United States government implements the recommendations of CERD and adheres to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to resolve these problems.”

The Campaign for a New Domestic Human Rights Agenda is a coalition of approximately 50 national U.S.-based organizations that came together to support human rights at home and abroad soon after the election last year. Among them are major human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and social justice groups.

###